

II. Goals and Policies

A. Transportation

Goals

1. A **community** with a safe, effective, and attractive transportation system that provides residents multi-modal access to employment opportunities within the region.
2. A community served by a light rail transit system which also is a catalyst for transit-oriented housing and commercial development within the station area.
3. A community with transportation **infrastructure** necessary to ensure public safety, efficient access to services, and general quality of life.

Policies

- P1 Strive to make the Columbia City area safe and efficient for bicycles and pedestrians.
- P2 Seek to improve east-west transit service that allows access to multiple employment centers and educational services.
- P3 Maximize community benefits through the management of parking around the light rail station.
- P4 Seek to replace and rehabilitate failed elements of the transportation system.
- P5 Improve pedestrian safety and convenience along Rainier Avenue and Martin Luther King Jr. Way.
- P6 Strive to make bus stops and transfer points safer, more visible, comfortable, and efficient through the use of

CPTED techniques and providing real-time transit information.

- P7 Maximize economic development and revitalization objectives through appropriately designed station area development.
- P8 Maintain current standard of goods mobility along Martin Luther King Jr. Way S.

B. Economic Development

Goals

- 4. A community with healthy businesses and healthy employment levels.
- 5. A community with retail and service businesses that serve community needs, particularly pedestrian-oriented commercial development.
- 6. A neighborhood that promotes entrepreneurship within the community.

Policies

- P9 Encourage mixed-use and pedestrian scale development projects within the Columbia City and Hillman City business districts.
- P10 Support the continued work of the Rainier Main Street program.
- P11 Strive to retain and build upon the unique pedestrian-friendly qualities of the Columbia City, Hillman City, and Genesee business districts.
- P12 Strive to establish commercial zoning compatible with the primary uses, activities and market demands within the commercial centers.
- P13 Develop methods to foster business incubator opportunities and local business ownership within the community.
- P14 Assist residents in gaining access to employment services, information technology, and centers of employment.
- P15 Encourage the development of businesses that will increase the number of local jobs with opportunities for advancement and more highly paid professional, technical, and managerial positions (such as high technology businesses).



C. Housing

Goals

7. A community with healthy and attractive single-family residential areas.
8. A community with a variety of available housing options for a mix of income levels and household sizes.
9. A community that provides opportunities for owner-occupied housing among existing community residents.

Policies

- P16 Pursue the repair and rehabilitation of older housing whenever possible.
- P17 Strive to develop and employ neighborhood design guidelines to ensure that new multifamily housing has an appropriate scale and character and is transit-oriented, where appropriate.
- P18 Support the realization of **HomeSight's** Home-ownership Zone proposal in the vicinity of Columbia City.
- P19 Support the increase in housing density through securing the required infrastructure as density increases.
- P20 Maximize light rail related investments to ensure the development of quality housing with appropriate community amenities.
- P21 Utilize public private partnerships to develop quality affordable housing.
- P22 Encourage housing as part of mixed-use development projects such as live/work spaces and artists lofts within the business districts and on vacant or abandoned lots.
- P23 Provide incentives for new housing development near high capacity transit facilities.

D. Cultural/Human Resources

Goals

10. A community with adequate open space for the residential population.
11. A community with a library that serves community needs.

12. A community where social service needs are addressed in an efficient and non-invasive manner.

Policies

- P24 Identify and develop sites for new P-patches.
- P25 Promote the incorporation of public art into the development of public and community facilities.
- P26 Strive to improve library services to better serve the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee community.
- P27 Seek to involve the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee community in planning efforts for the siting and use of essential community and public facilities in the Planning Area.

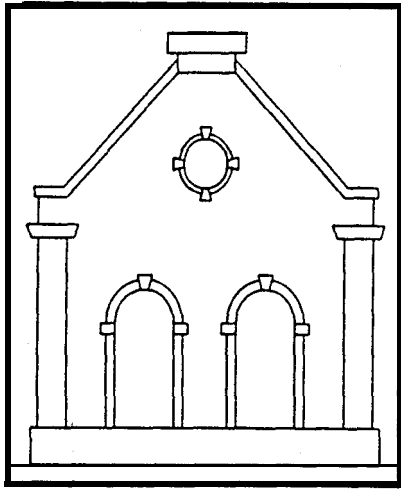
E. Public Safety/Image

Goals

13. A neighborhood with strong community-based policing efforts.
14. A neighborhood with property and human rights protection for all residents.
15. A neighborhood with an attractive physical appearance and a positive image.

Policies

- P28 Support police service funding that keeps pace with population growth and changes in crime statistics.
- P29 Seek housing incentives for police officers to live within the community.
- P30 Develop tools to combat generalized negative media portrayals of the surrounding area.
- P31 Develop strategies to ensure more regular pick-up of street litter and elimination of graffiti within the commercial centers.
- P32 Strive to improve security lighting near schools, parks, public facilities, parking lots, and in alleys.
- P33 Support the continued availability of HOME improvement and building facade improvement funds, while strictly enforcing exterior maintenance codes.
- P34 Promote a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) program in the neighborhood.



III. Plan Elements

A. Columbia City Community Focus

Strengthen the Columbia City Core as a historic, mixed-use, pedestrian oriented community focus.

Columbia City has the opportunity to be South Seattle’s premier community-based center for cultural and commercial activity. To achieve this, the plan recommends intensification of commercial and residential uses while maintaining the “small town” historic scale, integrating the transportation system, and improving community services. Because the core is the community’s central focus, pedestrian connections reaching outward are a high priority, as are the improvement of Columbia Park and the greening of the Columbia Elementary’s (Orca) westside playfield. Public/private efforts should be undertaken to develop key parcels within the core to help ensure quality and contributing development.



Figure 14: Columbia City Historic District

Background

Few areas in Seattle still retain an individual identity or consistent architectural or historical character as Columbia City. Columbia City contains a significant number of buildings that embody distinctive characteristics of turn of the century modest commercial and residential architecture. Together, these structures contain the qualities of a small American community or town in the early 20th Century. The City of Seattle formally recognized these qualities in 1978 by designating Columbia City as a Landmark District.

The core, or “Community Focus” of Columbia City contains a mixture of commercial buildings, churches,, apartments, civic uses,

single-family residences, and schools. At the community's north entrance is the historic Carnegie Library and Columbia Park, a small village green also known as "Columbia Green." The majority of the district's businesses lie on Rainier Avenue South. Most of these structures are two stories, with the tallest buildings at three stories. Columbia City is noted regionally for its rich diversity of ethnic foods, with restaurants ranging from Sicilian to Ethiopian. Side streets off of Rainier contain a mixture of small businesses, parking lots, vacant structures or lots, apartment buildings, churches, and offices. Very little new development or revitalization has occurred on these side streets in the past 20 years. One block **beyond Rainier**, the majority of uses are single-family residential. As within the business district, these structures represent the small, modest scale of small town, turn of the century development.

Problems

The biggest constraint in achieving the community's vision for the neighborhood involves overcoming the area's negative perceptions. Rainier Main Street's *Strategic Economic Action Plan* addressed this in 1996 and indicated that addressing the perception/reality of crime and creating a positive business environment must be a top priority if the area is to achieve success. Despite a recent resurgence revolving around the opening of a handful of new businesses in the historic district, conditions that contribute to a poor image persist. These conditions include:

- Lack of rehabilitation and revitalization on the business district's side streets just off of Rainier.
- Lack of newer, contributing, market rate multi-family housing. Most multifamily housing within the area was built during the Boeing boom years of the 1960's and constructed as quickly and cheaply as possible.
- Deteriorating or nonexistent infrastructure. A number of streets within the neighborhood developed without curb, gutter, and planting strip improvements. This condition contributes to a perception of disorderliness.
- Lack of property maintenance and a general look of disinvestment. Although order is predominately maintained along Rainier Avenue within the business district, a significant number of properties remain in poor repair and/or are abandoned. Excessive litter and weeds, **graffiti**, and abandoned cars persist and further contribute to the negative image.

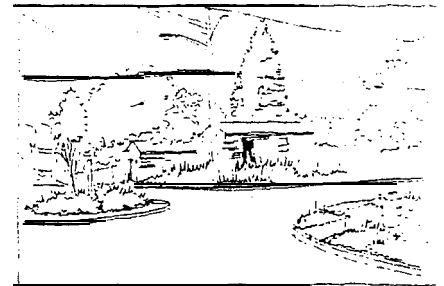


Figure 15: Side Streets on the Outside Edge of the Business District

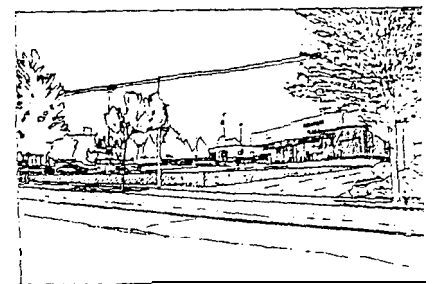


Figure 16: Columbia Plaza



An integrated approach is needed to address these issues and achieve the community's vision. The Public Safety and Community Livability element contains recommended actions addressing safety and cultural issues throughout the entire Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee planning area. This element focuses on zoning and physical oriented actions specific to the Columbia City core area.

Implementation Strategy

Collectively, the proposed actions direct Columbia City towards its vision as an interesting, attractive, and vibrant commercial and residential community linked through transit to other neighborhoods and employment centers within Seattle and the greater area. The development of Sound Transit's light rail transit system into the area will likely be the single most important planning event for Southeast Seattle in the next 25 years. The 37th Avenue tunnel light rail route with the Columbia City transit station provides the strongest long term community and economic development opportunities of the four alternatives. (See *Figure 17, page 22.*) The major positive factors associated with this transit option include:

- The station area's centralized location
- Ability to draw people into the business district
- Pedestrian orientation
- Limited negative traffic impacts
- Increased likelihood of stimulating new housing
- Limited potential noise impacts

While a community recommendation may not guarantee the Columbia City station at Rainier and Edmunds and the fact that the operation of the transit system itself is more than ten years away, the neighborhood's top immediate priority is to make some zoning changes. These zoning changes aim to:

- Encourage market-rate, multifamily housing around the business district's edges (NC2 to NC2/R zone changes),
- Provide landowners more choices in developing their land (**NC2** to NC2/R).
- Stabilize and strengthen historic single-family residential uses on Edmunds Street and 35th Avenue (L3 to LDT, unless the selected transit station is at the **Edmunds/MLK** site).
- Maintain existing small town scale and atmosphere in the business district by limiting heights predominantly to 40 feet (from 65') and limiting intrusive uses on the properties

within the Post Office's block (NC3-65 to NC2-40 and NC2/R-40).

- Preserve street front commercial uses on Rainier Avenue within the business district (NC3-65 to NC2-40).

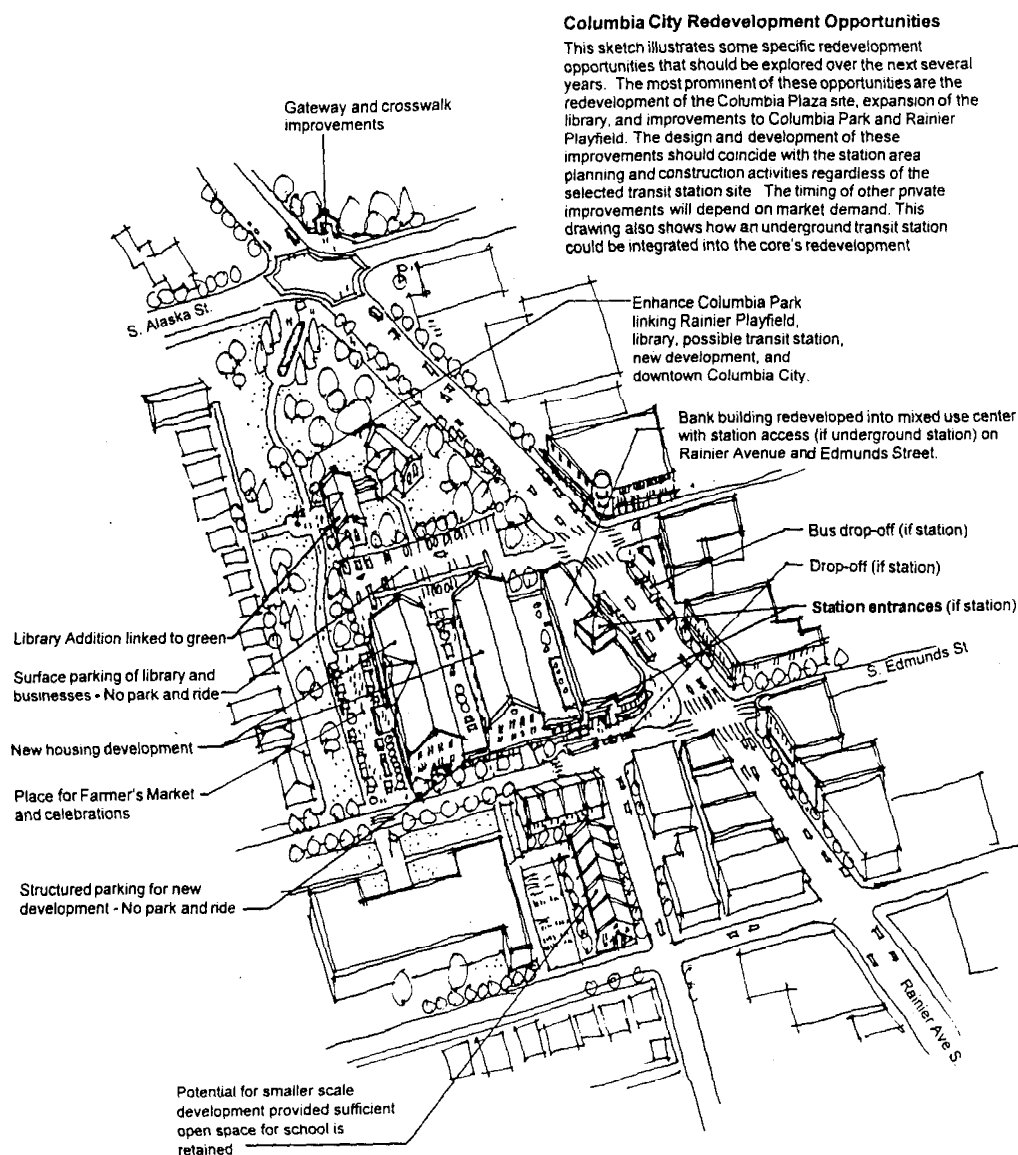


Figure 17: Columbia City Redevelopment Opportunities.

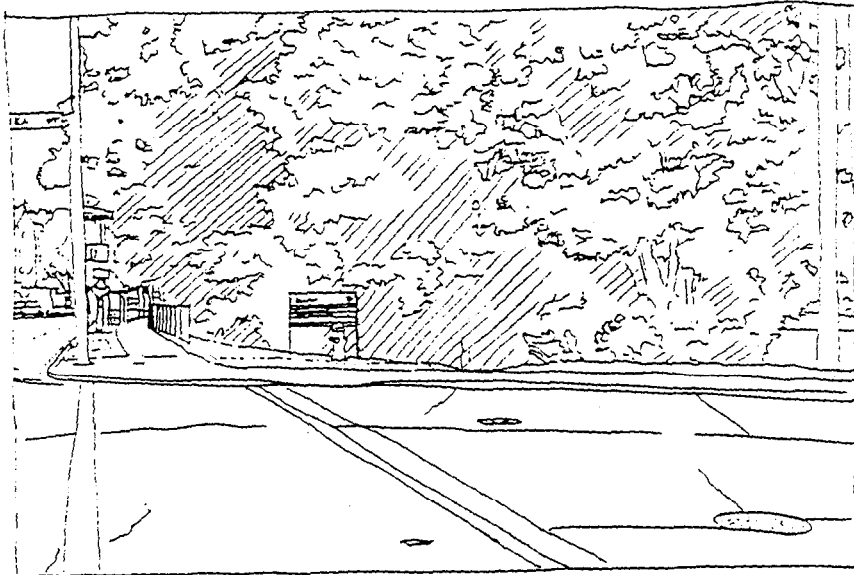


Figure 18: Existing Entrance to Rainier Playfield at Rainier Avenue and Alaska Street

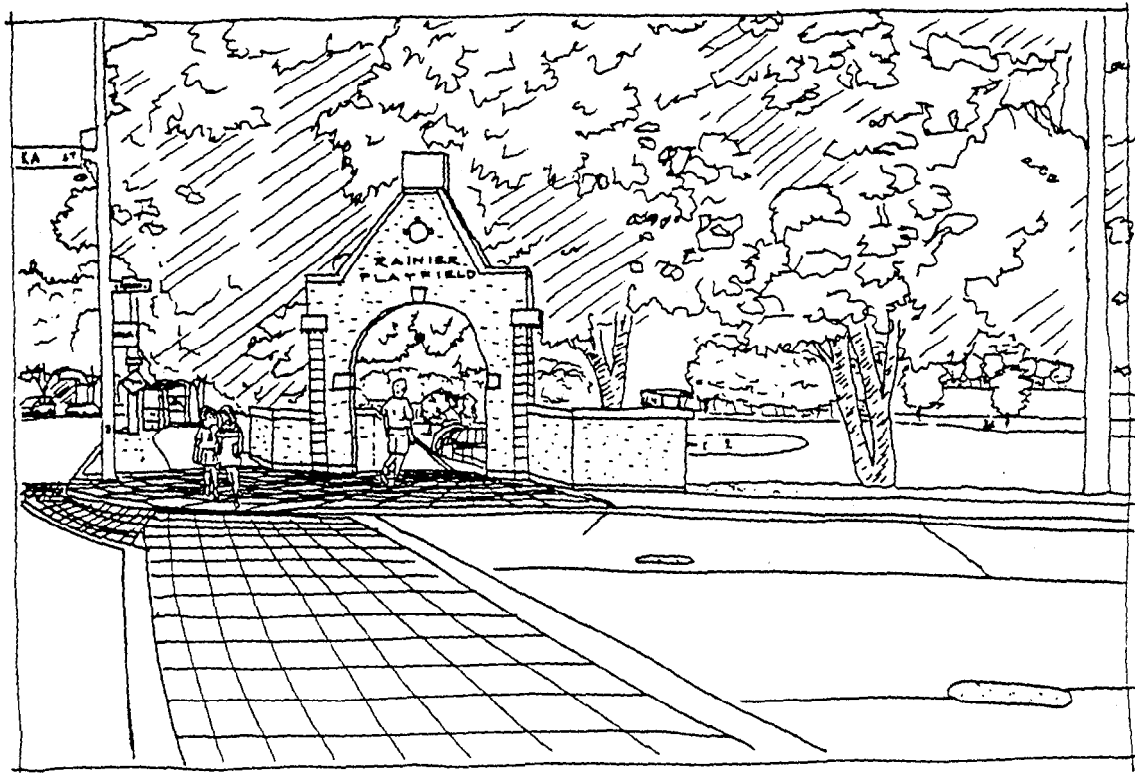


Figure 19: Rainier Playfield with Entryway Improvements

The most important of these changes is the NC2 to NC2/R change on most of the side streets of the business district. While a resurgence is occurring on Rainier's **streetfront**, the side streets are still struggling. New multifamily housing is needed here for a multitude of reasons, among them to provide increased pedestrian

activity and a stronger market for local retail uses. Existing NC zoning directs landowners and developers towards retail uses while the proposed NC/R tends to provide more options for property owners and developers. The NC/R zone encourages residential uses while still permitting a great variety of commercial uses.

The highest priority physical improvements involve anchoring the historic district's north end. Redevelopment of the adjacent Columbia Plaza with a mix of uses, including **streetfront** retail with offices above and residential uses towards the park, is one of the highest community priorities. Constructed in 1957 as a supermarket, this structure ignores both the historic streetfront retail pattern and the Columbia Park at the rear. Considering the location of the site (adjacent to the library, park, Rainier Avenue, and Edmunds Street) and the relatively large size, the redevelopment of this site represents an opportunity to make a major positive impact on the district. The site's redevelopment should also incorporate a permanent location for the Farmers Market (connected to Columbia Park). Residents prioritized the improvement of Rainier **Playfield**, particularly the visible entryway at the northeast corner of Rainier Avenue and Alaska Street. Expansion of the **adjacent** Columbia City Branch Library has long been sought to more adequately serve the area's educational needs. In conjunction with the redevelopment of Columbia Plaza and the library **expansion**, the plan recommends improvements to Columbia Park (a.k.a. Columbia Green). The purpose is to enhance the park as the community gathering spot and primary site for community events, such as the Farmers Market and the Heritage Festival.

Curb, gutter, and planting strip improvements and street tree planting are essential to stabilize and improve the image of the neighborhood's single-family residential areas. A number of streets within the neighborhood were developed without these amenities. Without such improvements, these streets are likely to maintain their general look of disinvestment, with unkempt yards, deteriorating housing, and cars parked randomly on the sidewalks and lawns. Landscaping or "Greening" Orca School's bleak asphalt playground and parking lot is another action that should be taken to improve the image of the neighborhood.

Other recommendations to enhance the core include reducing the number of travel lanes on Rainier Avenue S. down to two and improving the response time of pedestrian activated street signals. The plan also recommends actions to maximize the core's on-street parking efficiency, such as adding angled parking to select streets



off Rainier. All of these aim towards building upon the many positive aspects of the historic district by improving the pedestrian environment, and increasing the parking capacity for businesses.

Top Priority Columbia City Community Focus Actions

1. Develop the 37th Avenue S. tunnel light rail transit (LRT) route with an underground transit station at 37th Avenue S. and S. Edmunds Street to provide a centralized transit station and build upon Columbia City's opportunity to become South Seattle's premier community-based center for cultural and commercial activity. If an MLK station is chosen, provide substantially more public and private investment in the Columbia City core.
2. Make zoning changes to preserve the small town character of the historic district, encourage the development of new multifamily housing on the side streets within the business district, and stabilize single-family residential areas.
3. Encourage the redevelopment of the Columbia Plaza site to strengthen the north end of the Historic District.
4. Provide curb, gutter, sidewalk, and alleyway improvements to stabilize and strengthen single-family residential areas.
5. Enhance Rainier Playfield by improving park entryways and accessibility.
6. Green Columbia Elementary School's (a.k.a. Orca) playground to improve the image and appearance of the neighborhood.
7. Improve the pedestrian connection between Rainier Vista and Columbia City's business district.
8. Provide enhancements to Columbia Park (a.k.a. Columbia Green) to help stimulate a positive image for Columbia City.
9. Enhance the pedestrian connection between Rainier Vista and Columbia City by providing pedestrian-oriented improvements on Alaska Street and Edmunds Street between MLK and Rainier.
10. Extend the signature streetscape elements of the Historic District along Rainier Avenue to the side streets within the business district.

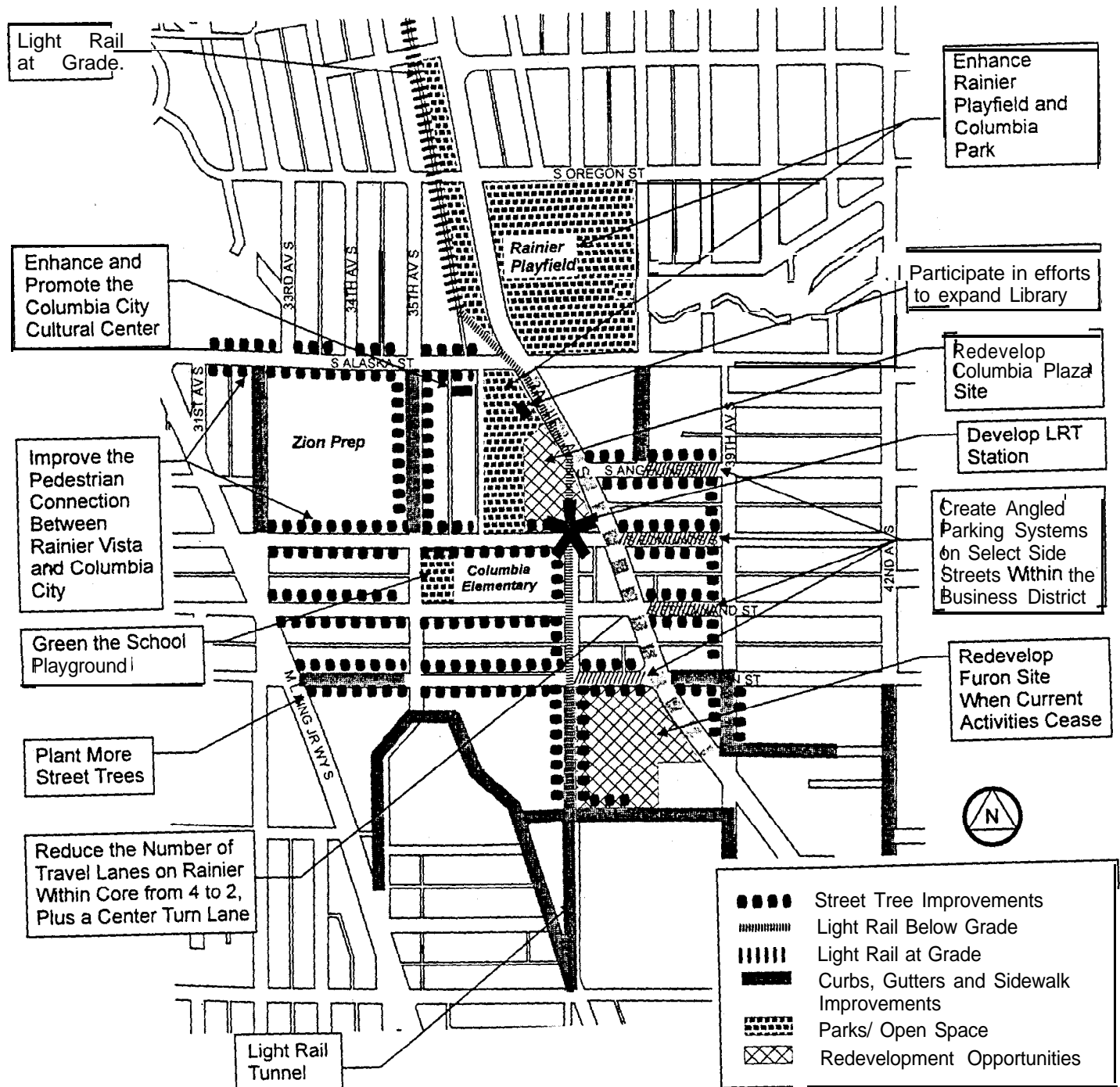


figure 20: Columbia City Community Focus Improvements

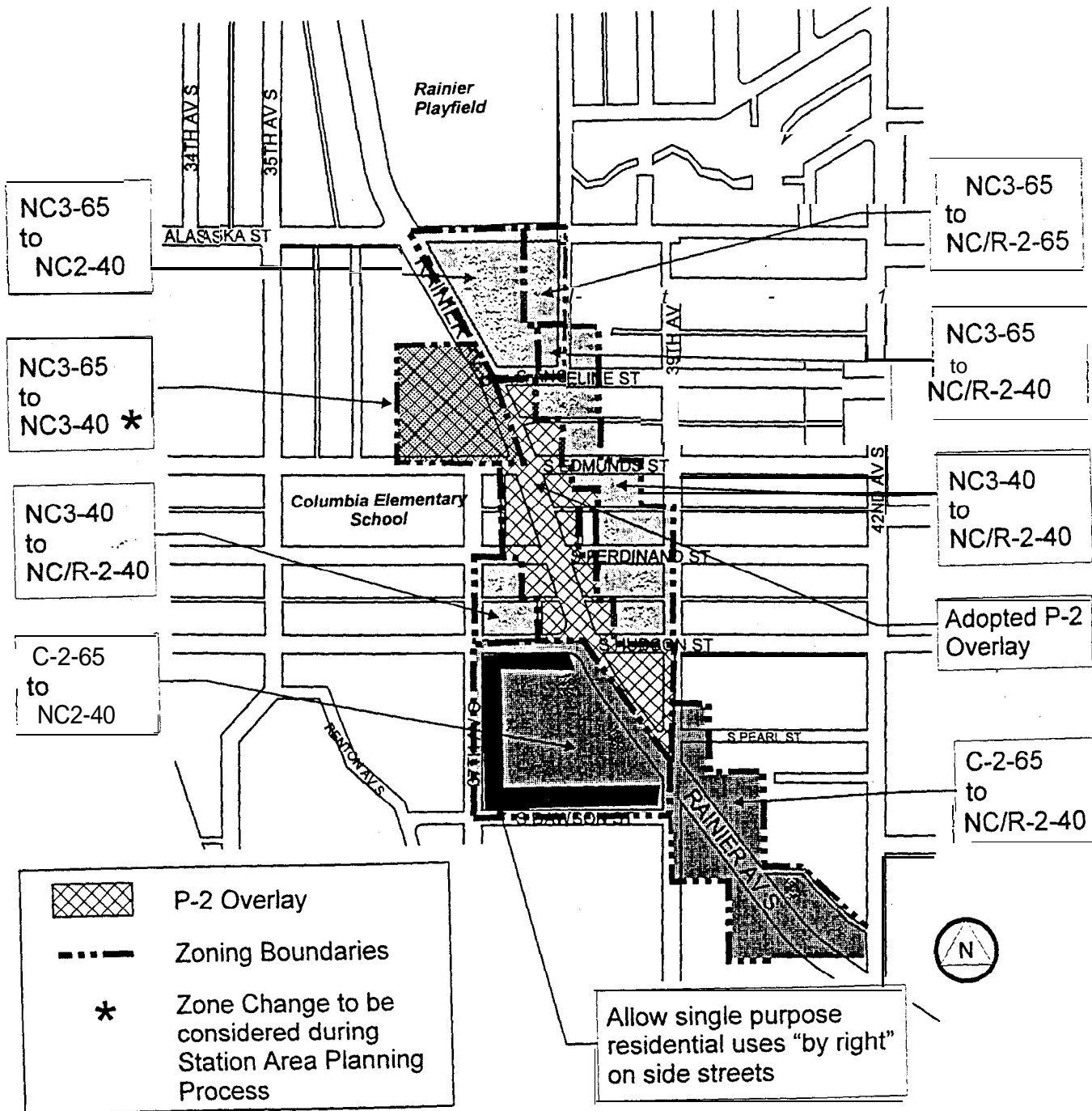


Figure 27: Columbia City Community Focus Regulatory Measures

B. Rainier Corridor

*Enhance the Rainier Corridor as a series of commercial districts and neighborhood centers along an **efficient** transportation corridor.*

Rainier Avenue is often thought of as an homogenous commercial corridor, when in fact there are several individual districts segments that each have their own character and opportunities. The fundamental strategy of the Rainier Corridor is to focus on these specific areas by recommending regulatory activities and capital improvements that reinforce and strengthen their identity.,

Background

Rainier Avenue South is the principle north-south arterial street in Southeast Seattle. It runs the length of the Rainier Valley and beyond, from the City of **Renton** northward to Seattle's Central Area. The 2½ mile-long segment of Rainier Avenue within the planning area (from S. Charlestown Street in the north to S. Holly Street in the south) connects the neighborhood centers of **Genesee**, **Columbia City**, and **Hillman City** with each other and points north and south. King County/Metro's bus line #7, which utilizes Rainier, maintains some of the highest ridership numbers of any of the routes within its system.

One of the corridor's biggest assets is the rolling terrain and its gently shifting alignment. Although sometimes seen as a constraint to the valley's commercial development, its terrain and alignment contribute to the strength and character of the neighborhoods along the corridor. They also contribute to interesting views and provide cues to one's sense of arrival to and departure from a "place."

Similar to other Southeast Seattle communities, poor perceptions and a pattern of disinvestment are major barriers to the improvement of the neighborhoods along the Rainier Corridor. Heavy auto traffic and poor roadway conditions along Rainier have also served as barriers to the corridor's investment. Several reasons for optimism persist, however, with successful new developments such as the QFC grocery store and Eagle Hardware to the north of the planning area and Rainier Valley Square in the Genesee area.

Corridor Neighborhoods

Of the three neighborhoods along the corridor, **Genesee** is the least defined, but the most economically successful according to Rainier

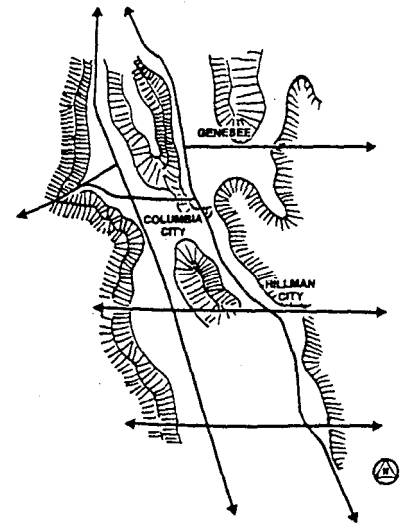


Figure 22: Rainier Corridor Terrain



Main Street's *1996 Strategic Economic Action Plan*. Much of this success is attributable to the recent Rainier Valley Square development (between S. Charlestown Street and S. Andover Street), with anchor retailers such as **Safeway**, Starbucks, and Hollywood Video. Occupying the north end of the corridor, the remainder of Genesee's business district contains a combination of large-parcel, auto-oriented commercial uses, a dairy factory, small lot residences and fringe businesses, and a number of vacant buildings and parcels. Although the district does not have a strong, identifiable focus or core, the vacant and under-utilized properties at the **Rainier/Genesee** intersection present an opportunity to develop a nodal area or focus for the neighborhood. On the east edge of the intersection is a vacant supermarket building (with current plans for its reuse as a mini-mall) and an entire vacant block.

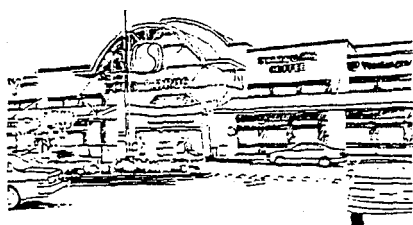


Figure 23: Rainier Valley Square in the Genesee Business District

Previously discussed Columbia City, immediately south of Genesee, is clearly the most identifiable neighborhood along the corridor. Between Columbia City and **Hillman City** lies a transitional area with a mixture of auto-oriented service uses and health/retirement service-related uses. This area also contains a number of redevelopable sites. Historic **Hillman City**, located at a crest in the valley, is commonly described by residents as deteriorating and depressed. However, with a near continuous facade of streetfront buildings and a modest pedestrian scale, **Hillman City** has the opportunity, many believe, to become an attractive neighborhood center. With several vacant and underutilized buildings for sale or lease, the community has substantial square footage available for a variety of commercial uses. A mixture of single-family and multifamily residential uses predominate south of **Hillman City**, except for the small neighborhood commercial node at Graham Street. The property on the northwest corner of this intersection is vacant and available for commercial or mixed-use development.



Figure 24: Hillman City Business District

Implementation Strategy

As with Columbia City, the top priority immediate action is to make zoning changes. The corridor contains a large surplus of underutilized commercial land, particularly between the commercial cores. Through changes to zoning and other programmatic incentives discussed in the Residential Neighborhoods and Housing element, the community substantially improves its chances of developing/redeveloping vacant and run down properties along the corridor. More housing in the transitional areas between the business district cores not only creates a larger

Transit Routes West of Rainier:

Parkland and Redevelopment Opportunities

This sketch illustrates some general parkland and redevelopment opportunities that might occur over the next several years. It is not intended to illustrate specific park or development proposals. The size and location of redevelopment projects may vary considerably. Timing of the projects will depend on market demand. The drawing is intended to help public participants visualize the way Sound Transit's light rail transit system could integrate with community goals.

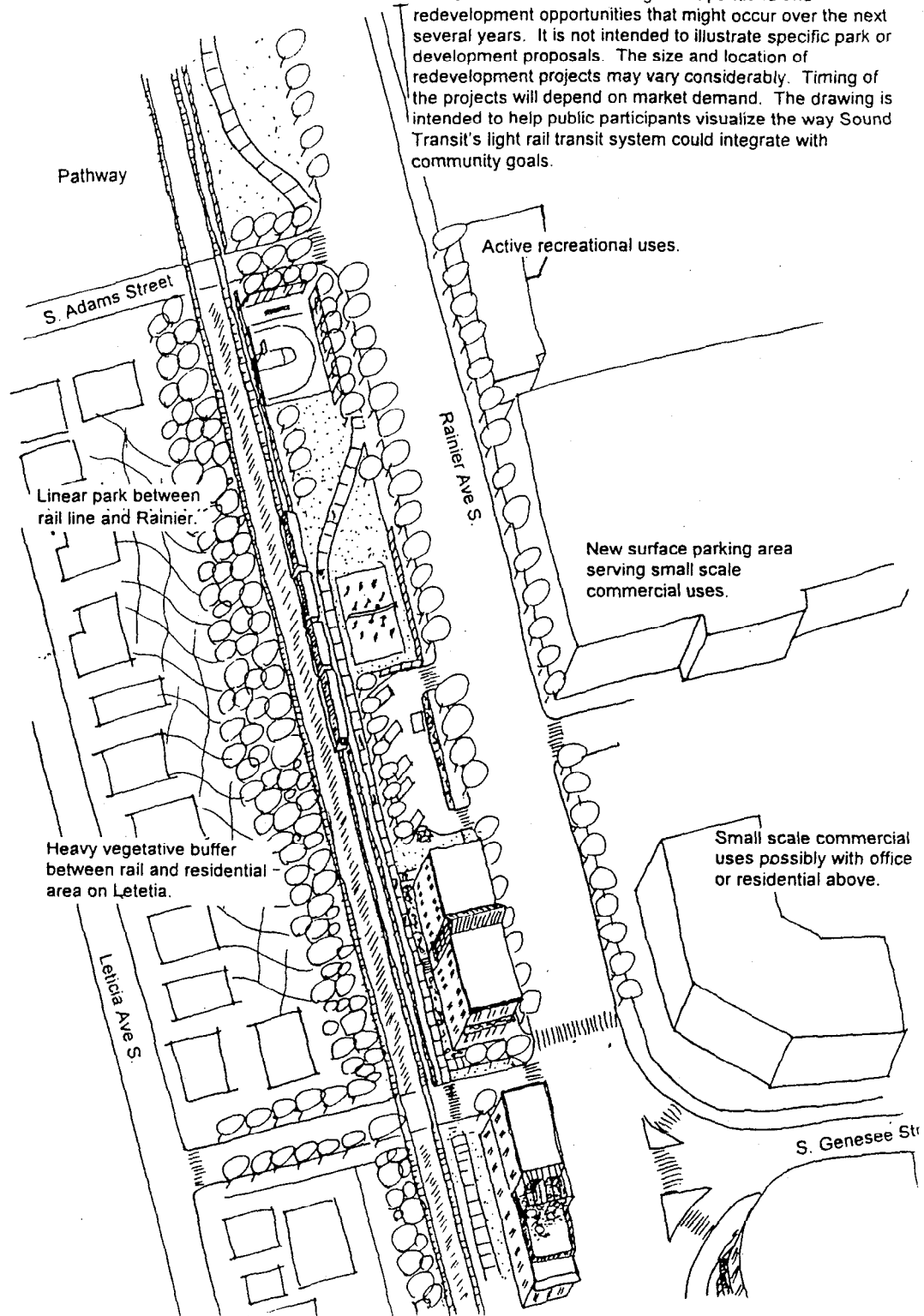


Figure 25: Parkland and Redevelopment Opportunities Associated with a Rainier Transit Alignment



market for those commercial uses, but helps to further define and identify the commercial districts. By focusing multifamily uses along the corridors, residents have easier access to public transit and services, and thus limiting the need for automobiles.

Enhancing the physical condition of the surface of Rainier Avenue is a high neighborhood priority. Residents and merchants cited a number of problems such as excessive standing water on the roadways and lack of adequate curb heights. Common results include illegal parking on the planting strips and harsh pedestrian conditions due to the continuous splashing of waves of water from the adjacent roadway. The plan, therefore, recommends a complete resurfacing of Rainier Avenue with concrete. Despite the high initial cost, this will reduce the long term maintenance cost, particularly considering the heavy volume of bus traffic, and improve pedestrian conditions.

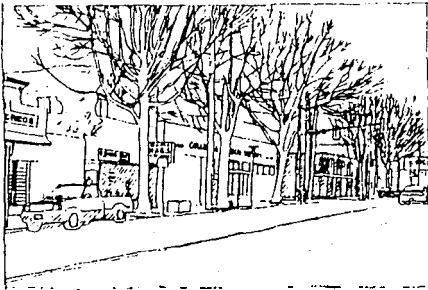


Figure 26: Existing Conditions in Hillman City

Complimentary to the zoning changes are the recommendations for gateway and streetscape improvements in the **Hillman City** and **Genesee** business district cores. The intent of these improvements is to add definition and character to these districts. Streetscape improvements are particularly important in **Hillman City**, where the City just established a pedestrian overlay zone within the district to promote pedestrian-oriented uses. Creating decorative gateway features at strategic locations to identify and celebrate the districts is also a high priority of the community. **Gateway**-oriented improvements cost less than district-wide street improvements, and thus can be implemented sooner.



Figure 27: Hillman City with Streetscape Improvements, Facade Enhancements, and Redevelopment

In conjunction with the community's recommendation for the 37th Avenue tunnel LRT alignment, the plan seeks the development of a linear park adjacent to the transit line and Rainier Avenue in the **Genesee** area. The linear park, occupying a +/- 70 foot strip of land immediately west of Rainier Avenue S., could include separated bicycle and pedestrian pathways and a combination of active and passive recreational spaces. Coordinated with the linear park and pathway would be sites available for pedestrian-oriented redevelopment opportunities. An example location would be adjacent to the S. **Genesee** Street intersection. Since the LRT alignment follows the west side of Rainier and thus requires property condemnation, strong measures should be taken to compensate and assist effected property owners in relocation.

Top Priority Rainier Corridor Actions

1. Make zoning changes to encourage the development of quality housing along the corridor and neighborhood-friendly commercial uses in the business districts.
2. Develop/redevelop vacant and run down properties along the corridor.
3. Create gateway features incorporating public art at the major entries to Genesee and Hillman City.

Make traffic signals more pedestrian friendly.

Improve the visibility of crosswalks.

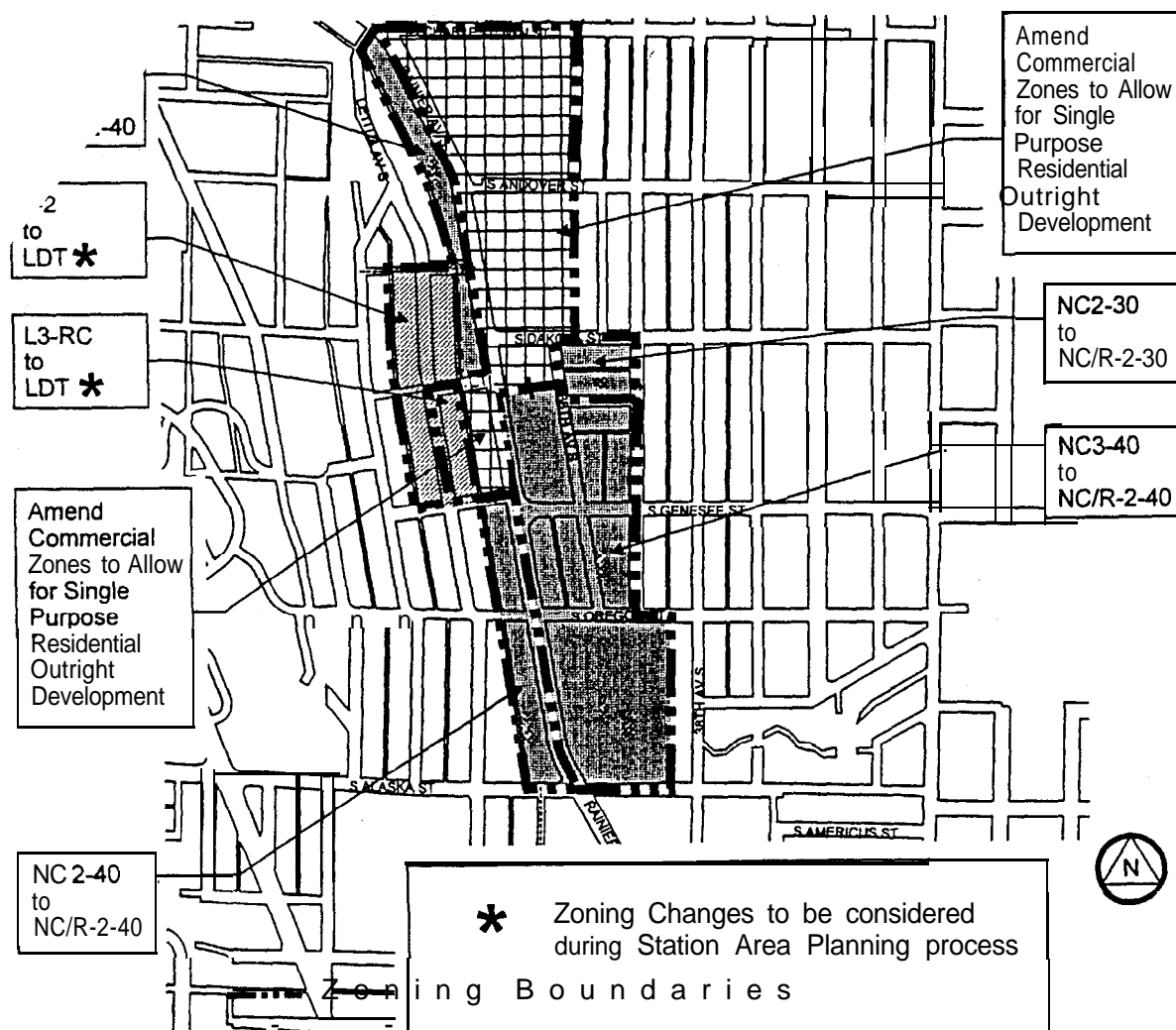


Figure 28: Proposed Zoning Changes in the Genesee Area

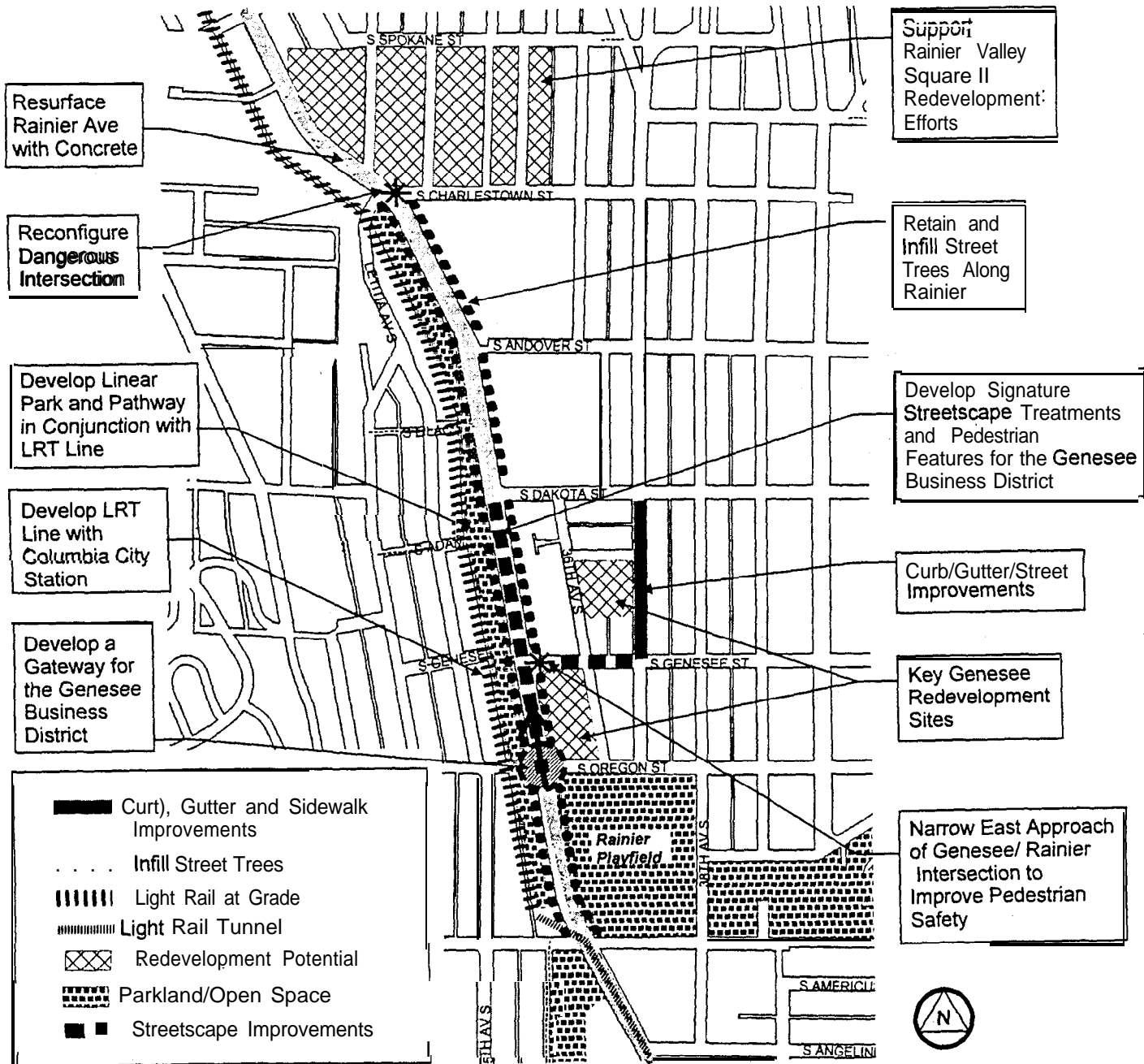


Figure 29: Proposed Genesee Area improvements

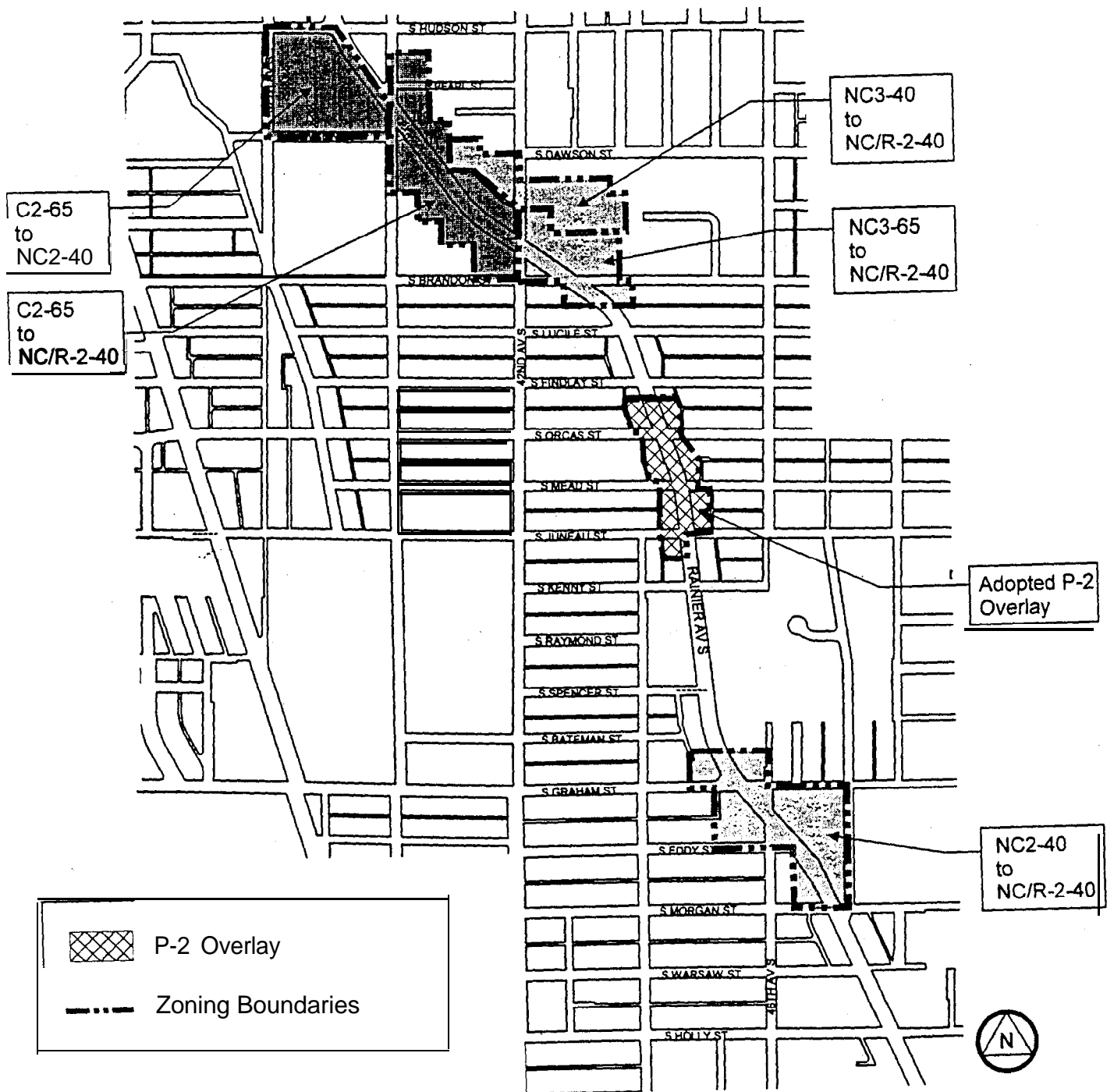


Figure 30: Proposed Zoning Changes in the I-II/Man City Area

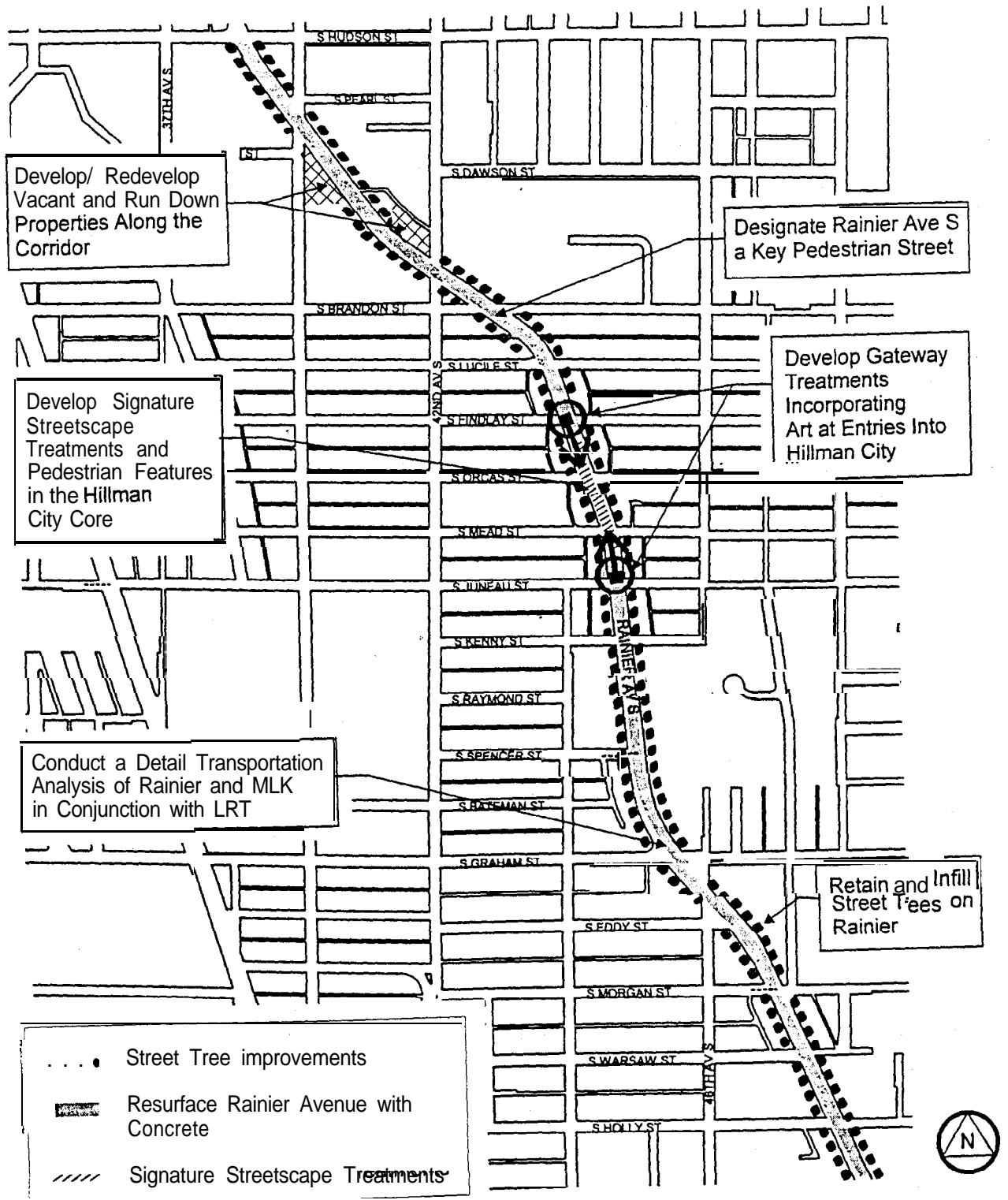


Figure 31: Proposed i-ii//man City Area Improvements